



**C2D – Centre for Research on Direct Democracy
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Lithuania:

Country Report

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ABSTRACT

If we would like to find out a single and most important feature of individual political behaviour in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989, of course, it should be an unconventional political activity and direct political actions. Altogether, a marathon of referendums in 1992- 1996, instead of encouraging of participatory culture, stimulated the protest behaviour in Lithuania's politics, when citizens became politically active only if they have had an object to oppose certain decisions rather than they were interested to support positively one or another position, or discuss different political alternatives. In general, the basis of electoral mobilization was rather protest politics than politics of participation and support from the very beginning of re-democratization in Lithuania.

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1. Non- orthodox political behaviour and direct democracy

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Direct Democracy: country-report on Lithuania

Algis Krupavicius, Giedrius Zvaliauskas

1. Non- orthodox political behaviour and direct democracy

If we would like to find out a single and most important feature of individual political behaviour in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989, of course, it should be an unconventional political activity and direct political actions. This form of political behaviour especially flourished in the early phases of democratisation. In case of three Baltic nations, the non-violent re-democratisation since 1988 was named as a “singing revolution” because of numerous massive rallies what “quickly became occasions for venting anger, for giving expression to pent-up emotions accumulated through five decades of hypocritical and oppressive Soviet rule, and for articulating demands for reforms” (Vardys, Sedaitis, 1997, p. 125).

The “singing revolution” has culminated in the “Baltic Way”- a “human chain” from Vilnius to Tallinn on August 23, 1989 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Molotov- Ribbentrop pact, what led to the annexation of Lithuania by the Soviets in 1940.

The influence and efficiency of the non- orthodox political behavior in Lithuanian politics, especially till 1992, was determined by various and sometimes contradictive causes. *First*, the non- orthodox political actions, as signing of petitions, demonstrations, mass rallies and so on, was most efficient instrument of mobilization of public opinion, then the emerging new political elite was restricted in access of the official mass media, still under control of the Communist Party. *Second*, massive protest actions stimulated fears of *ancien regime* elite and encouraged them to strive for political compromise with a moderate opposition as well as to restrict violent response to a radical opposition. *Third*, during the initial phases of re-democratization typical channels of democratic political behavior as party membership, free and fair elections were not institutionalized enough neither organizationally, nor sanctioned by the law, not speaking about an absence of experience in conventional political actions. *Fourth*, also macro-political goals of re-democratization required collective political actions, and the protest was most convenient way to attract the masses. *Fifth*, if individual political preferences and party alignments were not structured enough on the basis on material and economic interests because changes in social structure and instability of emerging party system, a general consensus was achieved about main macro-political demands, i.e. on a re- introduction of liberal democracy, national independence, “back to Europe”. However, all these demands and goals were fixed in a political consciousness in a negative way, or as a resistance against and denial of the Soviet reality and practice. Democracy and independence were understood rather as a way to escape from the repressive political and social order, instead of thinking what new elements would be

introduced and could secure new style of social life. On the other hand, such way of actions is only a reflection of general logic of the regime- change, and then the old order needs to be destroyed before starting a building of new infrastructure.

An immanent feature of the non-orthodox politics is a dominant discourse of protest. In case of Lithuania the protest discourse did not disappear in a political horizon after re-establishment of national independence in 1991. On the contrary, it moved into dominant position in the domestic political stage. The former object of protest- the Soviet regime, was changed by a frustration about social costs of reform policy, that is, increasing inflation, unemployment, changes in social status, insecurity of incomes¹.

A degree of impenetrability of protest subculture in Lithuania might be reflected by few facts. On the eve of the Seimas elections in 1992 even 41 per cent of respondents declared that they took part in signing of petitions and protest letters, 33 per cent of them participated in demonstrations or/ and public rallies (The Baltic pre- election study: Lithuania, 1992). Certainly, the unconventional activity in 1992 was lower than in 1989, or at the moment of a peak of protest politics, when even 55 per cent of respondents participated in unconventional political actions (Lietuva ir Sąjūdis, 1990, p. 87.). However, an intensity of protest politics still was higher compared to advanced industrial democracies (see: Dalton, 1996, p. 74.).

The subculture of political protest was encouraged by a legitimate authority of Lithuania and by most influential political groups, especially, by the right wing of Sajudis since 1990. A general poll answering a question- "Do you favor [the idea] that Lithuanian state should be an independent democratic republic?" and scheduled by Lithuania's leadership on February 9, 1991 was a reaction of resistance against the "parade of referendums" on sovereignty planned by Gorbachev in March of 1991² rather than a real decision on independence, because the act on restoration of Lithuania's state was already adopted on March 11, 1990 by the Supreme Council- Re-constituent Seimas. The same function of popular resistance and reaffirmation of already taken political position has had a referendum in June 1992 on a complete withdrawal of the former Soviet troops from Lithuania's soil.

A mechanism of referendum, despite, that it is a conventional form of political behavior and participation, frequently was used for solution of domestic political conflicts (being highly inefficient in order to reach practical and desirable political decisions- A.K.) and was supportive for increasing role of protest culture. A marathon of referendums' on internal political issues has been started by the referendum on re-establishment of presidential institution before the adoption of new Constitution in Lithuania in May 1992. Till 1996 the way of referenda was most often chosen by the Right-wing political parties, namely by

¹ More on social changes see: Taljūnaitė M., 1996, pp. 303- 305.

² The All-Union referendum on a "sovereignty of republics" on March 17, 1991 was boycotted by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

the Sajudis and later on by the HU(LC). However, the initiative of referenda was turned out from the HU(LC) to the LDLP, which just before the Seimas elections' 96 proposed as many as three different themes for referendum: on a decrease of number of the members of the parliament; on establishing a constant date of the parliamentary elections; and on an allocation of no less than a half of national budget expenditures for social welfare policies. That step by the Labour party was a desperate attempt to mobilize already the diffused former supporters. Nevertheless, the Homeland Union attempted not to stay behind the LDLP, and the Conservatives proposed to have new referendum on a compensation of savings of population, what was lost in the period of hyperinflation in 1991 and 1992. A similar referendum was lost by the HU(LC) in 1994. This time the Conservatives defined the forthcoming large- scale privatization as a source for compensations.

All the issues presented for referenda in autumn of 1996 have lacked political logic and consistency, as well as were populist in the essence. A direct and real target of the referenda questions was political mobilization of supporters of one or another party. Finally, even this objective was failed to reach by both parties (not speaking about reaching political decisions on proposed issues), because even size of the Conservatives' electorate remained in a "frozen" situation.

Obviously, since 1992 the referendums were used as an expression of political opposition rather than it was the instrument of law making, or consultation on the future laws in the domestic political framework. But if the right wing political parties, and, first of all, the HU(LC), initiated different referendums' and were able to mobilize relatively stable and broad party electorate step by step, the centre and leftist parties as usual argued for the opposing of majority of referendums' issues³. As the result, behaviour of these parties not only contradicted to the conventional forms of political participation, but all these parties were unable to unite their potential supporters around themselves and helped to individual voters to motivate and take politically inactive positions. Altogether, a marathon of referendums in 1992- 1996, instead of encouraging of participatory culture, stimulated the protest behaviour in Lithuania's politics, when citizens became politically active only if they have had an object to oppose certain decisions rather than they were interested to support positively one or another position, or discuss different political alternatives. In general, the basis of electoral mobilization was rather protest politics than politics of participation and support from the very beginning of re-democratization in Lithuania.

³ A law on referendum of Lithuania's Republic requires an absolute majority (50%+ 1) of "yes" vote of all registered voters in order to adopt a decision by the referendum. In this situation all the referendums on domestic political issues failed to reach a decision, except a referendum on new Constitution since 1992.

2. Traditional technologies of direct democracy

The law on a referendum was passed in November 3, 1989 by the Supreme Soviet of Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. A mechanism of referendum played significant roles in the process of restoration of Lithuania's statehood in 1990 and 1991. Later national referendums became into an instrument rather of party politics.

To be more specific, there are especially strict procedure and high requirements for the amendment of the provision of the Article 1 of the Constitution which declares that *"The State of Lithuania is an independent and democratic republic"*. Both Article 148 of the Constitution and Article 1 of the Law of Referendum states that this provision *'may be amended only by a referendum, provided that no less than 3/4 of Lithuania's citizens possessing the right to vote express their approval thereof.'*

Article 147 of the Constitution regulates the procedure to initiate the amendment or appendage of the Constitution by referendum and states that *'a proposal must be submitted to the Seimas by either no less than one-fourth of the members of the Seimas, or by at least 300,000 voters.'*

The right to announce the referendum initiated either by citizens or by the members of Seimas is granted to the Seimas, Parliament of the Republic of Lithuania.

2.1 Subject- matter of popular votes

The 1989 referenda law as well as amendments to it states that "the most urgent issues relating to the life of the State and the Nation shall be resolved and the provisions of laws of the Republic of Lithuania may be adopted by a referendum. Legal provisions on economic issues may be adopted by a referendum only upon conducting an economic examination of future consequences".

Article 68 of Lithuania's Constitution emphasizes that "provisions of the laws of the Republic of Lithuania may also be adopted by referendum". It means that all politically and socially relevant issues may become into subject of referendum, except of decisions in economic area that are restricted by a requirement to have an initial economic evaluation and forecast of possible decisions via referenda.

Article 71 of the Constitution states that "the President of the Republic must, within five days, sign and officially promulgate laws and other acts adopted by referendum". Actually held referendums in Lithuania in 1991- 2000 show that all to country's independence related issues were adopted by referendum procedure, the first article of the Constitution, the Constitution itself etc.

2.2 Initiatives of referendum

Proposal of referendum. Along the article 3 of the Referendum law: "Citizens of the Republic of Lithuania, political parties, other political and public organisations shall be granted the right to campaign without any restrictions for the proposal to call the referendum, for the adoption of legal provisions or for

the settlement of issues of utmost significance for the life of the State and the Nation which have been submitted to the referendum, as well as to campaign against the proposal to call a referendum or the adoption of provisions of a law or any other decision. For exercising the above right, citizens, political parties, other political and public organisations shall be provided with premises for meetings and rallies and they shall also be guaranteed possibilities to make use of the mass media according to the procedure established by the Central Electoral Commission. Political parties, other political and public organisations and citizens may allocate their own funds for campaigning. Chief officers of the national defense and internal service units, and chief officers of the places of confinement shall provide conditions for the political parties' and political organisations' referendum organisation representatives in the Central Electoral Commission to visit, in relation to the issues of the referendum, the units and places of confinement upon presenting their certificates". In general only two subjects have a right to propose referendum, i.e. "Article 8. The Right of Initiative to Call a Referendum" states that "The right of initiative to call a referendum shall belong to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania and the citizens. The right shall be implemented on the proposal of more than half of the members of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania whereas the initiative of the citizens shall be expressed by the request of at least 300 000 citizens of the Republic of Lithuania who have the right to vote."

Implementation of referenda proposal. The law clearly requires that initiative group would form a committee for the referenda, which "shall openly prepare and conduct the referendum. Public notice must be given of all events related to the organisation of the referendum (meetings, sittings), as a rule, no later than two days prior to the day said events are to be held. The Committee for the Referendum shall inform citizens about its work, the formation and membership of region, town and rural district committees for the referendum, their location and working hours, the lists of voters and the results of voting and the referendum. Observers from political parties, other political and public organisations may, upon written authorisation therefore, participate in the sittings of committees for the referendum as well as during the voting and vote calculation in voting districts and during the establishment of the results of voting and the referendum. Provisions of laws or the most urgent issues relating to the life of the State and the Nation which have been submitted for the referendum shall be announced through the mass media.

The mass media shall inform about the organisation and execution of the referendum. Representatives of the mass media shall have the right to unrestrictedly participate in all events organised by the committee for the referendum as well as obtain information concerning the preparation and execution of the referendum."

Time frame of referenda proposal. In November 3, 1989, The Supreme Soviet of Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic passed the law on referendum where the time term was regulated in the Article 10. "The term of realization of the citizens right initiative to call a referendum. A term of two months shall be

established for the implementation of the citizens' right to initiate to call a referendum on a specific issue. The term shall be counted as of the day of registration with either the District, City Soviet Council, or with the State's Notary Office of the initiative group of citizens of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania consisting of at least ten persons possessing the right to vote. The registration deed must be recorded together with the registration. One copy of the deed shall be sent to the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Socialist Republic of Lithuania no later than on the next day following the registration."

However, in June 15, 1994 the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania passed amendments on the law of referendum. Article 10 said that "The term shall be counted as of the day of registration with the Central Electoral Commission of the initiative group of citizens of the Republic of Lithuania consisting of at least ten persons possessing the right to vote." Therefore, the registration of the initiative groups was centralized and placed to the Central Electoral Commission.

Calling a referendum. The request concerning the calling of a referendum need be addressed to the Seimas. The Article 12 of the Referendum law states that "upon receiving the properly executed concluding statement of the citizens' initiative group together with the citizens' requests - statements and the conclusion of the Central Electoral Commission that the above documents are in conformity with this Law, the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania during the session shall consider the issue of calling the referendum at its next

sitting to which representatives of the referendum initiators shall be invited to participate. The resolution of the Seimas concerning the calling of the referendum shall be adopted according to the procedure established in the Statute of the Seimas. Should the Seimas state that draft amendments to a law which are submitted for referendum are not in conformity with the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the issue of amending the Constitution must be considered in the first place. In the event that the Seimas resolves to consider and pass the submitted provisions of a law, the calling of the referendum may be postponed, however the referendum must be called at the sitting at which the Seimas rejects the submitted provisions of a law". The referendum must to be called no later than 3 months after the day of adoption of the Seimas resolution.

Establishment of the referendum results. The Law of Referendum lifts high requirements for the adoption of the specific issue proposed for settlement by the referendum. Article 32 states, that *'Provisions of a law of the Republic of Lithuania or any other decision shall be deemed adopted by referendum if more than half of the citizens included in the lists approved thereof during the referendum. If less than half of the citizens included in the lists took part in the referendum, the referendum shall be considered not to have taken place.* Thus, the voters turnout may be crucial in the acceptance of the issues proposed for the adoption by the referendum.

In addition, Article 34 states that all decisions which have been adopted by the referendum may be amended or repealed only by the referendum.

Initiatives of referendum in Lithuania's politics. Since 1994, when the amendment of the Article 10 was passed, there were 6 times when the citizens' employed their constitutional right to initiate a referendum. All these initiatives were registered at the Central Electoral Commission according to the law on referendum. However, the information about the citizens' initiatives is not available before 1994 due to the absence of coordinating institution.

Thus, 5 out of 6 initiatives failed due to insufficient number of collected signatures of the citizens who supported initiative. Only, the initiative of HU(LC) was successful and the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania called a referendum in 1994.

Table 1. Initiatives of referendum since 1994.

| Data of registration of initiative group | Political party | Provisions of referendum | Collected number of signatures | Remarks |
|--|---|--|--------------------------------|---------|
| 21.04.1994 | Homeland Union (Lithuanian Conservatives) | Implementing the law on "illegal privatization, accounts, shares and the failure to respect protective legislation". | 561,436 | |
| 15.11.1995 | Group of people | <p>Provision 1. Elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania and to the Municipalities shall be carried out by voting for personalities, but not for list of parties. It shall be elected 91 members of the Seimas.</p> <p>Provision 2. Existing number of the State's and Municipalities' public officials and the number of ministries shall be reduced no less than in half.</p> <p>Provision 3. It shall be determined, that all income (profit) of the organizations and of the citizens either of Lithuania or abroad, which is allotted to the investments in Lithuania for the creation of new work places, for development of production and enterprises shall not be taxed by any taxes.</p> <p>Provision 4. It shall be determined, that untaxed minimum of income of residents is 0,75 of average monthly salary</p> | More than 200,000 | |

| | | | | |
|------------|------------------------------------|--|------------------------|--|
| | | in the Republic (Untaxed minimum of the income would be 350 Litas in October 1995) and the income tax of the residents shall not be higher than 28 percent. Provision 5. The Tribunal of the state shall be elected by direct elections and all necessary empowerments shall be granted for the struggle with organised crime and corruption. | | |
| 28.03.1996 | Lithuanian National Progress Party | 'Land of the State of the Republic of Lithuania may belong also to the citizens of foreign states, international organizations and juridical persons of foreign states by the right of ownership.' | 296178 | In June 3, 1996, the initiative group made public statement and declared, that it has collected 296178 signatures. However, there were stolen 65000 signatures out of the headquarter of the organizers of referendum. The initiative groups regrets, that it failed to collect necessary number of the signatures. In addition, the initiators of the referendum met with intensive opposition of political parties (except Lithuanian National Party "Young Lithuania" and Lithuanian Freedom Party) and with resistance of their supporters. The individuals were openly terrorized and met with threatening who collected signatures. That was the reason only 20-30 people were left out of 600 persons who started to collect signatures when 4-5 days passed. |
| 23.05.1997 | Lithuanian Social Democratic party | "Do you approve, that the following infrastructure of the state-owned strategic companies would be privatized: oil industry companies ("Butinges Oil", AB "Mazeikiu Oil", "Oil Terminal", "Naftotekis", "Geonafta"), thermal and electrical energy companies of production and supply ("Ignalinos Nuclear Plant, , AB "Lietuvos dujos," "Lithuanian Energy"), municipality-owned water supply companies, telecommunication and communication companies ("Telekom," Center of Radio and Television), transport companies ("Lithuanian Railways", "Lithuanian Navigation"), Klaipedos Harbor, Airports". | 180,000 | |
| 10.10.1998 | Lithuanian Peasants | Provision 1. The Mayors of the Municipalities shall be elected | There is no informatio | |

| | | | | |
|------------|-----------------|--|------------------|--|
| | Party | directly by the residents of the Municipality during elections to Municipality Councils. Provision 2. The Chief of seniunija shall be elected directly by the residents of seniunija during elections to Municipality Councils. | n | |
| 20.10.1999 | Group of people | Provision 1. All members of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania shall not be elected by the list of parties, but shall be elected only in the single-mandate constituencies. Provision 2. The powers of the Seimas member shall be terminated, if more than one half of his/her electors of the constituency declared it. Provision 3. The salary of the public officials and public servants shall not exceed the 5 average wages of employee in Lithuania. | 175757 | The member of the initiative group Vytautas Nezgada in his interview to newspaper said that none of political parties endorsed the initiative group. Political parties were not concerned with idea to organize this referendum. Most part of political parties neither criticized the idea of referendum nor assisted to accomplish it. |
| 10.10.1998 | New Union | 'Law on indemnity of damage made for the citizens by illegitimate and groundless activities of public servants' | 51592 | The initiative was not registered due to the insufficient number of corectly collected signatures. |
| 19.01.2000 | New Union | Law on State Budget of 2000 – to redistribute military spendings in favor of education and science | Not finished yet | Unknown yet |

Source: Central Electoral Commission of Republic of Lithuania. Jokubaitis S. (2000), *Referendumu pamokos*. Kauno diena, No. 30, p. 2. "Lietuvos aidas" 1994 April 21, 1996 January 25, No. 17. 1997 September 3, No. 172.

Legislative incentives and citizens

Along the Article 68 of the Lithuania's Constitution the right of legislative initiative belongs not only to members of the Seimas, the President of the Republic, and the Government, but as well as citizens enjoy the same right, i.e. "*a draft law may be submitted to the Seimas by 50,000 citizens of the Republic of Lithuania who have the right to vote. The Seimas must consider this draft law*". Exact procedures of a submitting the draft law by citizens are regulated by a Law on legislative initiative passed on October 22, 1998.

The requirements to initiate a law a more simple compared to referendum proposal. First of all the initiative group is rather small because it is enough to register only 10 members. However, the final proposal needs to be signed by 50 thousand voters.

2.4. Petition

Petition is a political act which is quite common in most of democratic polities. The Constitution (Article 33) of Lithuania guarantees “the right to criticize the work of State institutions and their officers, and to appeal against their decisions. It shall be prohibited to persecute people for criticism.”

Law on petition is applicable mostly in these 3 major areas, i.e. reforming government and its institutions, local self-government, and to guarantee and implement human rights and civil freedoms. Petitions can be forwarded to Seimas, Cabinet of Ministers and municipality.

Associations and direct democracy

Certainly, trade unions, non-governmental organizations, even political parties are at the core of direct democracy, because they intend to defend professional, economic, social rights, and other interests of citizens. Moreover, they enjoy a right to hold meetings, as well as to organize rallies, demonstrations and other mass events in the manner established by law, i.e. pickets, demonstrations, processions, various marches and other peaceful and unarmed meetings. Another important dimension of their activity- their shape public opinion on various issues by ability to disseminate an information concerning their own activity and propagate the goals and tasks of the organization without any interference, to establish public information media and engage in publishing.

3. Plebiscites and referendums.

In 1991- 1996 Lithuania became into leading country along the referenda criteria held within the single country only in six years period. Total number of plebiscites and referenda reached double digit of 10. However, only 3 referendum’s initiatives became into laws because of two factors: on the one hand, of low turnout in the referenda, and on the other, a high threshold of “yes” votes to pass a decision by referendum (see Table 2).

Table 2. Referendums and voting results

| Date | Subject, or question | Voter turnout (%) | Percentage of "yes" votes in a total number of electorate |
|------------------|--|-------------------|---|
| February 9, 1991 | On Lithuania's independence (plebiscite) | 84,7 | 76,46 |
| May 23, 1992 | On restoration of Presidential Institute in Lithuania | 57,68 | 39,89 |
| June 14, 1992 | On an immediate and non-conditional withdrawal of military troops of the former Soviet Union from a territory of Lithuanian Republic in 1992, and compensation of material damage to Lithuania | 76,0 | 68,95 |
| October 25, 1992 | On the adoption of new Constitution | 75,25 | 56,76 |

| | | | |
|-------------------|--|-------|-------|
| August 27, 1994 | On illegal privatization, compensation of banking savings and distorted justice | 36,9 | 32,0 |
| October 20, 1996 | Constitutional amendment: "The Seimas consists of 111 Members, and Seimas is considered as acting body if no less than 3/5 of its members are elected in the elections " | 52,1 | 33,87 |
| October 20, 1996 | Constitutional amendment: "A regular election to the Seimas are held in every four years on second Sunday of April" | 52,1 | 33,12 |
| October 20, 1996 | Constitutional amendment: "No less than a half of national budget expenditures are devoted for needs of social welfare, health care, education, and science" | 52,1 | 33,0 |
| October 20, 1996 | On a compensation of banking savings through a just privatization of state property | 52,1 | 38,98 |
| November 10, 1996 | On a free sale of agricultural land in Lithuania | 39,73 | 17,24 |

Vaineikis K. (1994) Politologijos studijos. Technologija, Kaunas, p. 114; "Valstybės žinios", 1996.10.30. No.104, p. 62; 1996.11.20, No.111, p.25.

Party role in the initiation of referenda is more than obvious- 9 referendums and 1 plebiscite- were held upon an initiative of a single or few political parties each time.

Local initiatives

Lithuanian democracy is still young and developing. Consequently, the NGOs are still young and inexperienced. Although many of the NGOs are registered at the local level within the municipalities, only few of them have ever developed their projects and proposals for resolution salient local issues. This situation was the underlying reason to start to conduct project 'NGOs and Local Governments Working Together' to enhance the constructive dialog between the representatives of Local Authorities and community based NGOs. The main task of this project was to involve the citizens together with the public officials to the process of identification the most salient issues at the local level. The purpose was not only to produce common project action plan, but also to start the process of implementation. Hence, this project gave an opportunity for citizens to set the strategic goals of local community and to design their future. This project took place from September 15, 1997 to August 31, 1998 and was conducted by Development Associates, Inc. and the Municipal Training Center at the Kaunas Technology University.

In the project, there were selected 8 cities: Marijampole, Klaipeda, Kaunas, Panevezys, Mazeikiai, Siauliai, Kedainiai and Taurage. During the training events and consultation the participants were provided with the operational knowledge how to work effectively and to resolve practical problems. Above all, in each city, the representatives of the NGOs and the public officials representing Local Authorities together prepared strategic projects to resolve the most salient issues at the local level. For instance in Marijampole it was created project of Disabled Integration Center, and the team for the implementation of this project was formed. In Sauliai it was created project to improve Social Services in

Siauliai Region. Thus, realization of this project gave not only practical knowledge but it served as the stimulus for the preparation of particular programs reflecting local issues in all 8 cities where the project took place⁴.

The U.S.-Baltic Foundation

Among other activities, The U.S. – Baltic Foundation American-Lithuanian Initiative (henceforth USBF) started Community Partnership Program to regenerate countryside communities. The underlying aim of this project is to improve social, economic, physical environments of local communities. USBF initiates organization of community sessions, seminars, cultural events, and provides with all necessary assistance for establishing Community Councils or Town Development Groups at Local Municipalities. In addition, USBF helps the citizens' groups to create their projects and assists in the process of implementation⁵.

Community Partnership Program in Jurbarkas

In February 23, 1999 USBF started its project in Jurbarkas. It was organized workshop "Main problems of Jurbarkas community and possibilities to solve them," which aimed at identification of the main problems of Jurbarkas community, and creation of appropriate programs to cope with them. At this workshop participated 31 individual, who were selected by Jurbarkas Municipality, in cooperation with the USBF and Ryan Campbell, US Peace Corps Volunteer. These individuals represented different segments of Jurbarkas community. During the meetings the most salient issues for the community were refined and created the list of priorities⁶. Three underlying issues such as unemployment, lack of business information and idea to establish Jurbarkas Town as a tourism center accompanied by USBF developed into specific projects in which representatives of the local community take part in the active way⁷. For instance the group is working on the process of establishing Business Information Center in Jurbarkas to stimulate business development⁸. Currently there are first results because this center got the premises, computers and elementary financial resources. The Business Information Center will start its activities when the head of center is selected⁹. By the way, during the community event "Our Town Day" it was distributed a questionnaire to community members in order to use citizen's opinion in future community organizing. Also the representatives of local community and Local Municipality of Jurbarkas are

4 Final report of project "NGOs and Local Governments Working Together". September 15, 1997- August 31, 1998.

5 <http://www.usbf.lt>

6 <http://www.usbf.lt>

7 Mateliene, D. "Trys sektoriai- viena bendruomene". Savivaldybiu zinios 1999, 29(81), p. 6.

8 <http://www.usbf.lt>

9 Zakareviciene L. "Partnerystes bendruomeneje iniciatyvos". Savivaldybiu zinios 2000, 5 (87), p. 16.

considering probability to establish a community center to organize educational, cultural and recreational activities in Jurbarkas. This community center may be a place for business and tourist information centers.

Sasnava Project

In March 1999 the USBF started its activities in small town Sasnava, which is located in Marijampole district. It was identified the major community problems and made decision on the future projects during the session. For instance because of these discussions, it was made decision to establish a youth NGO, and to organize "Our Town Day" community event, which was held in July 1999 and where took part over 300 members of Sasnava community¹⁰.

Projects in Skuodas and Birstonas

In November 24, 1999 the USBF initiated community sessions in Birstonas town to discuss the biggest issues. Before this session, in October it was distributed questionnaire for the members of Birstonas community to evaluate the level of activity of the members of Birstonas community and to find out their attitude towards work at community's level. Another aim of this survey was to get common picture of community and to achieve information about all organizations and groups operating in Birstonas to invite representatives of all of them in the community's sessions¹¹. All respondents were invited to take part in the project "Partnership in Community" (partneryste bendruomeneje) and to participate in the community's session. During session it was refined three the most salient issues for the community. However, the problems of youth employment (uzimtumas, taciau ne tik darbo) were left beyond of the three major issues of Birstonas. Consequently, the youth made decision to run their separate fourth project to resolve problems of young people in this town¹². Currently, in Birstonas community the process of creation of the project for establishment of Birstonas Community's Center (bendruomenes namai) is taking part. In addition, the youth, which is very dynamic, is uniting and seeks to establish the Center of Youth¹³.

Similar beginning of the community sessions was organized by the USBF in Skuodas town in the autumn of 1999. Currently, representatives of the Skuodas community are working on the Skuodas Information center project. Besides, there are considerations to establish Center of Skuodas Community¹⁴.

¹⁰ <http://www.usbf.lt>

¹¹ USBF information.

¹² USBF information.

¹³ Zakareviciene L. "Partnerystes bendruomeneje iniciatyvos". Savivaldybiu zinios 5(87), p. 16.

¹⁴ Zakareviciene L. "Partnerystes bendruomeneje iniciatyvos". Savivaldybiu zinios 5(87), p. 16.

Citizens Committees

One of the indicators of the active citizen's participation in the community affairs is the high participation in the elections of local authorities. In addition, the citizens may take part in the governing of the local community directly. Citizens may cooperate with the public officials and together with them to identify and create projects for the realization of the local community interests and preferences. As a device to realize this idea serves the establishing of Citizens Committees (Pilieciu komitetai) which accumulate the most active individuals at the community.

Jonava district

In October 7, 1998 the Jonava District Municipality initiated the founding of the Citizens Committee to get recommendations and suggestions for the formation of the strategic directions of Jonava District developments. For this purpose, it was organized open meeting in which 40 citizens took part. All of them were invited to be members of the Citizens Committee and 8 of them consented take part in this structure. The Committee worked in an organized way and it was arranged 9 meetings from October 21, 1998 to December 16, 1998. On agenda it was discussed issues related to social security, education, protection of nature, communal services etc. The specialists of the particular sphere participated in the meetings of the Citizens Committee and presented current situation¹⁵. The members of the Citizens Committee formulated the main issues according to importance and prepared list of the strategic projects and recommendations for the consideration of the Municipality to resolve local issues. The projects were divided in the long-termed and short-termed¹⁶.

Jonava city

The Citizens Committee was founded in Jonava City as well. The rules of the Citizens Committee were passed on May 13, 1999 and the Municipality invited citizens of Jonava to discuss and find out the most effective ways to improve the system of trash collection (konteinerines atlieku surinkimo). In 3 months were organized 6 meetings in which participated more than 20 citizens. The members of the Citizens Committee discussed the underlying problems and prepared the 4 projects how to resolve them¹⁷.

Alytus city

In January 30, 1997 The Municipality of Alytus passed the rules of the Citizens Committee. Hence, it was open possibility for the members of Alytus community more effectively participated in the local

15 Vaiciuniene J. (sudarytoja), (1999), Pilieciu dalyvavimas valdymo procesuose, Kaunas: Technologija. p. 70.

16 Vaiciuniene J., p. 71

17 Vaiciuniene J, p. 85-89.

affairs. However, the very first attempt to invite citizens to participate in the activities of committee was unsuccessful because only few individuals responded to this invitation. Again, in September 9, 1998 was organized public meeting in which were discussed the problems of disabled people. During this meeting the Mayor of Alytus invited all who attended in the meeting to participate actively in the Citizens Committee and to suggest their ways and means to resolve problems. Consequently, the Citizens Committee started its activities. After intensive activities this structure created the program for the integration of the disabled people to Alytus community¹⁸.

Kaunas district

The 24 Community Committees (*seniunijos bendruomenės komitetai*) are founded in Kaunas District, which were initiated by the Mayor of Kaunas District Municipality Donatas Jankauskas. The idea to make citizen's initiative active to participate together with the public officials in the solution of local issues arose one more than year ago. In November 2, 1998, the Mayor issued an order to oblige the all 23 villages Headmen to found committees where should be invited prominent persons of particular territory: the heads of public institutions, representatives of traditional religious groups, the NGOs, police, private business and all active members of community.

Now, there are 24 committees which deal with the various issues relevant to local community needs and create their suggestions and ways of solution to the Municipality of Kaunas District. In Kaunas district live around 80000 inhabitants and close to 500 are members of the community committees. Usually once a month each committee holds meeting, which is open to publicity and most importantly, the Mayor, vice-Mayor, Secretary, Administrator and Municipality representative for public relations, take part in it. Consequently, the members of the community committee have possibility to discuss all relevant issues and directly may propose solutions to the representatives of the Local Authority. Afterwards, when the information about particular community need is directly received, and there are problems which are not at the competence of the headman of village, the Mayor organizes meeting at the Municipality and strives for the ways to resolve them. Also, there is interesting aspect that each community committee meeting is organized in different place, that is in hospital, school, other public institution etc. Such a way helps better to be acquainted with the peculiarities of particular area.

In January 28, 2000, it was held the first meeting of all the most active representatives of the Community Committees in Kaunas district. There were evaluated one year activities of all Committees, and participants shared with their experience and with their problems.

¹⁸ Vaiciuniene J, p. 75-77.

In November of 1999, Kaunas District Municipality conducted sociological survey to find out of the members of the local community attitude about socio-economic issues in Kaunas district. Besides, it was made attempt to evaluate attitude of people to the public institutions and to discover the most salient questions for local communities. However, the analysis of the survey is still under process. It should be said, that employment of the sociological survey to collect information about citizens' attitudes is not the first time initiated by the Municipality. The results of survey will be used to solve particular problems at the Municipality level¹⁹.

In sum, it is obvious that all mentioned cases of the direct citizen's enrollment into solution of their needs at the local level, were stimulated, lets say, by external forces. The initiative of the citizens to organize themselves may be analyzed from top down perspective. In all cases, the first steps of initiatives were taken either by Municipal Councils or by the organizations such as the USBF, the MTC or by both parts. Afterwards, the prominent persons of local community, representative of the NGOs and active citizens support this idea and the process of local initiatives takes place.

¹⁹ Kaunas District Municipality information.